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MASTHEAD

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PRÉCIS

&c « capper » (p. 2).

&c « Ouroboros-esque » (p. 3).

&c « Canoe » (p. 4).

&c « blink » (p. 5).

&c « connubiality » (p. 7-8).

&c « recognition-connection » (p. 9-10).

NOTES

The puzzle pieces found throughout this issue assemble to form the article « Status in Everyday Life: A Formal Model for Application » by Larry Earlix.

The Innis Herald is usually published during the third full week of each month during the Fall and Winter terms. Meeting dates and deadlines may be found on our website. We hope to hear from you in the new year.

All submissions are welcome.

In the Realm of Oshima

IF you've seen the cover of the fall Cinematheque Ontario programme, you'd be forgiven for thinking that a David Bowie retrospective had been scheduled. The retrospective is actually focused upon the Japanese director Nagisa Oshima, best known for his Bowie-starring *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983) and his controversial, erotically explicit *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976). Though these two features are the promotional centerpiece of the current retrospective, it's telling that in the programme's introduction to Oshima's works (written by James Quandt, the Cinematheque's head programmer, for whom this retrospective is obviously a long-incoming labour of love), the former isn't even mentioned by name. Quandt rather, and rightly, gives the brunt of his attention to Oshima's output from the 1960s, beginning with *Cruel Story of Youth* (1960) and ending with *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* (1970). All told, Oshima produced 30 works for the cinema and television during this period, including three feature films released in 1960 (*Cruel Story of Youth*, *The Sun's Burial*, and *Night and Fog in Japan*) and three in 1968 (*Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Death by Hanging*, and *Three Resurrected Drunkards*). In his own way—as revolutionary a filmmaker of the '60s as Jean-Luc Godard (a comparison to which Oshima has frequently stated his dislike)—he's regarded by many critics as Japan's greatest living filmmaker; however, his output has steadily dropped off along with his health: his last film, completed in 1999, was *Gohatto*, which reunited him with Lawrence actor 'Bear' Takeshi Kitano.

The retrospective is by no means complete (Oshima's '60s TV work, according to Quandt, remains stuck in a nightmarish rights tangle), but it's a lifesaver for anyone interested in Oshima's cinema, given that so many of Oshima's theatrical works have yet to see release in decent, English-subtitled, non-bootleg DVD editions. Moreover, elements for public screenings in the past have been less than ideal (Quandt recalls, to his great embarrassment, a Cinematheque screening of a beat-up 16mm print of *Violence at Noon* [1966] with Oshima in attendance); thus, the presence of many new 35mm prints make the retrospective even more of a cause for excitement. As well, given how prolific Oshima was during the '60s, it's inevitable that a number of titles have fallen through the cracks (*The Catch* [1961] and *Pleasures of the Flesh* [1965], to cite but two), making their appearances in the retrospective that much more vital for both veterans and newcomers to Oshima.


Beyond sheer quantity, the admirable scope of Oshima's films from the '60s must be acknowledged. Dealing with subjects (frequently overlapping) as varied as the deplorable treatment of Koreans in Japan (by way of an informal trilogy consisting of *Sing A Song of Sex*, *Death by Hanging*, and

Three Resurrected Drunkards), true crime stories ripped from the headlines (*Violence at Noon* and *Boy*), the impotence of the student movement in Japan (*Night and Fog in Japan*, *Sing A Song of Sex*, and *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*), and detailing the lives of those living at the edges of Japanese society (*The Sun's Burial*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, and *Boy*), while still having time to complete an animated feature (*Band of Ninjas*), Oshima defied easy categorization throughout the decade. This applies to Oshima's style as well as his choice of subject matter: he moved from long takes (*Night and Fog in Japan*) to rapid-fire editing (*Violence at Noon*), black and white (*Death by Hanging*) to colour (*Three Resurrected Drunkards*), and intimately focused films (*Cruel Story of Youth*) to ensemble pieces (*The Sun's Burial*) with much ease. Oshima's restless (and seemingly endless) shape-shifting throughout the decade perhaps accounts for the sharp decline in his productivity later on, though he remained just as hard to pin down then, moving from *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*'s gay POW drama to the Buñuelian farce of *Max Mon Amour* (1986).

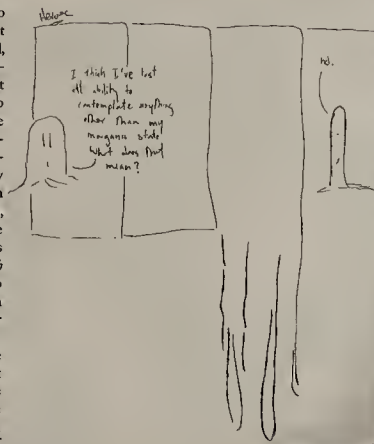
It's telling that Oshima has stated his admiration for Luis Buñuel above all other filmmakers (including, pointedly, Godard), and though *Max Mon Amour* most explicitly brings out this affinity, Buñuel's influence is reflected in a number of Oshima's films. The wedding without a bride and the grandson drunkenly attempting to sodom-

ize his grandfather in *The Ceremony* (1971); the Korean character R.'s unsuccessful hanging (followed by amnesia) and the Japanese officials' subsequent reenacting of his crimes in *Death by Hanging*; the Escher loop of *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* are but three examples of Oshima's embrace of Buñuel's keen sense of the absurd and the surreal. Oshima (especially early in his career) was often more didactic than Buñuel in inserting consciously topical, often political, subjects into his films; however, in two of three of Oshima's breakout 1960s films—in *Night and Fog in Japan*—explicit reference is made to the unrest surrounding the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. Nevertheless, the Buñuelian streak in Oshima's films cannot be denied, especially as his movies (particularly from the Korean trilogy on) began to increasingly break down in terms of strict realism.

It's in this way that I appreciate the two most popular of Oshima's films: *In the Realm of the Senses* and *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*. The former, Oshima's first major international coproduction, is a remarkably intense portrayal of a passionate, isolated obsession leading inevitably towards death and the latter is a queer-geared WWII drama that transcends the label of mere war movie with its complex characters, stylistic and narrative flights of fancy, and refusal to demonize either side of the conflict; pop icon Ryuichi Sakamoto's excellent score alongside his lip lock with Bowie don't hurt matters either. The theme of men in conflict caught up in homosexual passion carries over into *Gohatto*'s tale of 19th century samurai, serving as a fitting caper to Oshima's brilliant (if too quickly extinguished) career.

Quality DVD releases of many of Oshima's works (barring *In the Realm of the Senses* and *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, special editions of which are in the works from the American DVD label The Criterion Collection) may be a ways off, which is unfortunate; however, the mere presence of such a comprehensive retrospective (which is already rolling out all over North America) is enough to give one hope that the entirety of Oshima's oeuvre will at last start to get the recognition it so rightly deserves. 

WILLIAM
WALKER



Songs for the Dancing Chicken

AS a Herzog enthusiast, the referential title of Emily Schultz's debut collection of poetry, *Songs for the Dancing Chicken*, piqued my interest. Moreover, the usage of the penultimate, Ouroboros-esque scene from *Stroszek* (1976) as a book cover did more than just grab my attention – it gave me the impression that Schultz would delve into a creative exploration of the subtle nuances of Herzog's oeuvre. Unfortunately, Schultz's Herzog-inspired poems are not unlike the recapitulation of the fascimile image that appears on the cover insofar as they are merely rudimentary, synchronic snapshots of salient scenes in Herzog's films with little interrogation or creative investigation. For instance, « *The Conquistador of the Useless* », drawing upon *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), arrogantly attempts to re-present scenes from a filmic language into the comparably narrow scope of the written word without elaborating or engaging them in a way that justifies the pseudo-adaptation:

Many children wait to watch
Fitz fall asleep
to music —

or is it the music itself
they wait to observe?

and

The black umbrella of the dead
floats on water. A hand-cranked
phonograph preserves.

As well, the provocative banality of Herzog's final scene in *Stroszek* is bastardized by Schultz's over-simplification and obvious acknowledgement of the implicit ambiguity that Herzog so idiosyncratically constructed by means of her rhetorically playful questions in section 9 of « *Double-Double and Hell on Earth* »:

Are Herzog's animals friends? Does
the mallard who beats the
drum
keep time with the others? The rab
bit rides a fire truck in his
cage
and the piano-playing chicken pecks
at keys.

Rather than the lackluster Herzog-based poems of *Dancing Chicken*, it is poems such as « *The Man Out of Time* », « *A Climax of Dirt* » and « *The Boy from the Theatre, the Excrement of Dogs* » are where Schultz really hits her stride. She beautifully parades a fastidious, lyrical darkness

that both subsumes and distances the reader, placing him or her into a linguistic space – often instigated by fascinating formalistic experimentations (« *A Group of Empty Trees, Regularly Spaced* ») – that contains truly unique, enthralling cadences. « *The Boy from the Theatre, the Excrement of Dogs* » ends with the quintessential Schultz voice, which operates by luring the reader in and subsequently arresting the momentum of the poem in order to re-inscribe the mundane with an enigmatic ecstasy:

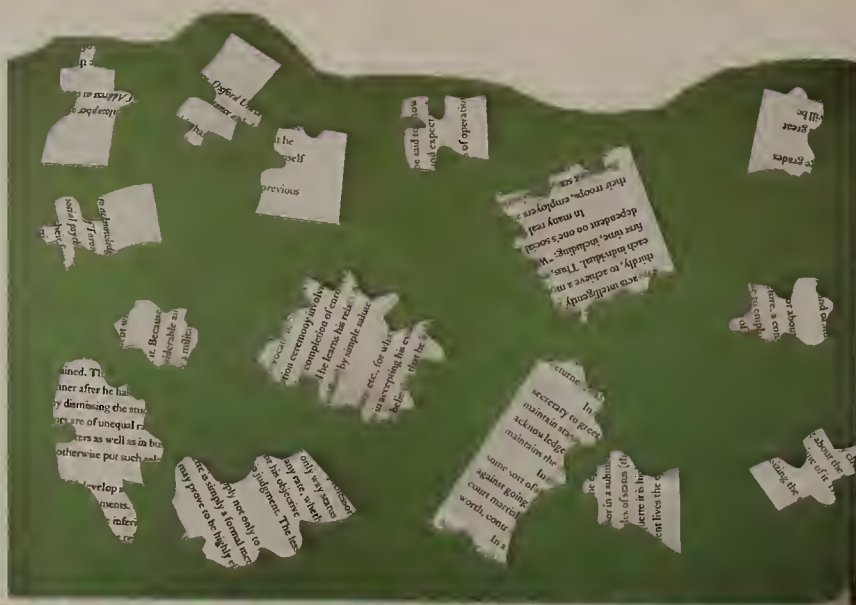
I lay dreaming
that we were a thousand years old.

When I woke you were sunlight
and my heart was the cold colour of
snow.

In the apartment below me
a spoon scraped the bottom of an empty
bowl.

Overall, Schultz is a more than worthwhile up and coming poet that has the ability to shock and stun in a very discreet manner so long as she does not try too hard to fit within the confines and parameters of a German auteur.

MICHAEL
SLOANE



Dubai: City of Transience

DRIVE through Dubai and this is what you will see: skyscrapers, each with a crane on top, still under-construction (has been and will be for a while still) and larger than life billboards advertising things to come (Dubailand, Arabian Ranches, Hydropolis, Dubai Waterfront, etc). Both scenes are true testaments of Dubai's recent construction/real-estate boom; seven and five-star hotels are almost as rampant as luxurious housing complexes built on man-made islands and condos soon to be in revolving buildings.

Dubai initially thrived mainly on its pearling industry, and recently on its oil production; with both industries dwindling, the latter expected to cease in the next 20 years, Dubai is desperate for ways to maintain its current wealth and attraction to Western investors and tourists. In creating economic free zones such as Dubai Internet City and Dubai Media city, including Dubai Studio City, it is guaranteeing continued interest and investment. The city presents an exercise in building a city from the ground up – literally. Dubai is essentially a desert; however, Dubai's city planning is much more ambitious than just building on desert land; added to the city's geographical make-up are several artificial islands and soon the underwater city, Hydropolis. The only part of old Dubai that survives is minute, and the only reason for its survival is because of its economic importance, and partly because of its tourist appeal. The traditional markets, souks, in the downtown area of old Dubai by the Creek comprise the majority of the remaining historical buildings, including Dubai's famous Gold Market.

Representations of the city are limited to hotel openings, fashion shows, and the latest business deals, all of which are always attended by celebrities as if to grant the event legitimacy. What is virtually absent from any representation of the city, however, is the largely immigrant working

class that comprises a large majority of the population. This sharp class division is not unique to Dubai. Working immigrants, like other foreign investors in Dubai, comprise a temporary population, a population in transience. The city itself is built with this transient population in mind; by that I mean the business investors and tourists more so than this working class population.

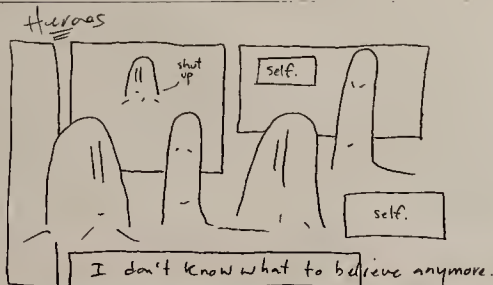
Diversity is disconcertingly visible in the sharp split between the locals, which is largely seen in traditional attire and the rest. The ambition the city is striving towards is admittedly achievable but similarly disconcerting. Nonetheless, there seems to be a charm in a city that is entirely ersatz; a charm that is entirely incomprehensible to me upon finding the city alienating when visiting it during the summer. Schools are established for international students, essentially the children of foreign businessmen in mind. Hotels and nightclubs are catering for the consistent influx of celebrities attending the latest hotel opening or film premiere. Malls are the only distraction for the city's permanent population, who aside from working and shopping have very little else to do. I guess it is the same appeal that drives flocks of people every year to Las Vegas or Hong Kong, each unique in their own way, but artificial nonetheless. But at least both Las Vegas and Hong Kong are not disillusioned by any pretenses of culture, unlike Dubai. Devoid of any culture, strictly thriving on a flow of money generated largely by its transient population, Dubai is strictly a financial hub. Despite its grandiose seven-star hotels, its entertainment districts and its glamorous nightlife (that let me say not everyone gets to participate in), Dubai is like a replica city that is stranded between quickly decaying remnants of its past, appropriating various Western modernizing aesthetics from the present, while looking ahead for developments that will make it stand apart in the future. While Dubai succeeded in becoming the financial hub of the

Middle East, I doubt it will ever achieve its ambition of becoming the cultural hub of the Middle East.

There even exists an internal rivalry between the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, both cities competing to become the hub of culture in the Middle East. Abu Dhabi with its newly established Middle East International Film Festival, currently in its second year, closely followed Dubai's Dubai International Film Festival, currently in its fifth year.

This incessant modernization has its advantages nonetheless. The Dubai Film Festival is one success story, I believe. It hasn't – not yet anyway – been contaminated with the obsession with attaining everything Western. Dubai became the first Middle Eastern State to effectively inaugurate an international film festival, one that is successfully bridging the gap between Western and Middle Eastern Cinema. (The key word here is "successfully" because technically other Middle Eastern cities have established international film festivals, but with little success and virtually no recognition from the West). Granted other areas in the Middle Eastern region have international film festivals, yet none have reached the eminence of the Dubai International Film Festival. This is by far the only development in Dubai that I see as being beneficial, not only to Dubai but also to the Middle East. The full effect of the festival is yet to be achieved; on the one hand, Middle Eastern films shown in the festival rarely make it to other international film festivals in the West, and on the other hand, Western films shown at the festival rarely receive distribution beyond the festival circuit in the Middle East. But every year in December, for the past five years, the cultural bridge between east and west is successfully bridged, however temporary.

ROLLA TAHIR



Notes on *Quantum of Solace* (aka *The Bond Identity*)

QUANTUM *of Solace*, directed by Marc Forster, is the twenty-second official film in the James Bond series. It once again stars Daniel Craig as the superspy (or action hero, if you will). The following is a set of critical notes regarding the film:

1. Peter Howell of the *Toronto Star* was entirely correct when he mentioned in his review of *Quantum of Solace* that the film was made for audiences who would rather watch *The Bourne Identity*. Hence, the end result is a so-called « *The Bond Identity* ».

2. Why are the producers, Ms. Broccoli and Mr. Wilson, so cruel to the movie-goer? They assume audiences are dumb and utterly visceral. Watching *Quantum of Solace* was like experiencing a confusing sadist ritual within a travelogue after ten cups of coffee.

3. If this film had a test audience at all, the individuals comprising that audience were undoubtedly under some sort of sedation.

4. The film does not deserve to be titled *Quantum of Solace* for it has no relation to the original story and essentially abuses the literary career of Ian Fleming. This is reflected in the fact that during the film's titles, Ian Fleming is named only added after « Daniel Craig as James Bond » appears on-screen. After all, the film is crafted into a manic thriller first and then labeled as a Bond film with no relation to the franchise or to the character.

5. One link this film has to previous installments, aside from the presence of James Bond and M, is the corpse of Ms. Fields covered in oil and lying on the bed

(a reference to the corpse of Jill Masterson, which was covered in gold and placed on the bed in *Goldfinger*). And yet this is still a contrived homage.

6. The entire course of the film features no charm on Bond's part and barely any romance.

7. There is a virtually total absence of comic relief in *Quantum of Solace*. The only moment in the film that the audience seemed to find humorous was when Bond left Mathis' corpse in the dumpster, which certainly says something about contemporary society.

8. The villain, Dominic Greene, is banal, and his death (the most important in any Bond film) is not even depicted. Plus, like its predecessor *Casino Royale*, the film lacks a henchman.

9. The plot is quite confusing, even for a spy film. It aims to stir suspense among viewers, but instead leaves them perplexed. Consequently, the film relies on chases, explosions, and brutal fights to remain « *entertaining* » at the very least. Could someone remind me why Paul Haggis was brought on board as a screenwriter?

10. The political and economic subtext of the film is too self-conscious and superficial. Why do the Americans always need to be presented as obsessed with oil, scheming to undermine world powers, and downright greedy? For the most part, this film was made in Europe by Europeans and for Europeans.

11. Feel free to add the repeated lack of gadgets to the multitude of Bond film mainstays absent here. Is someone at Eon Productions afraid to give John Cleese

a paycheck?

12. Also, the gun-barrel sequence belongs at the very opening of the film and not in the end credits. This is simple. There is no need to be « *experimental* ». Shame on you Marc Forster.

13. I'd comment on the film's theme song, but I've completely forgotten it, and I wonder why.

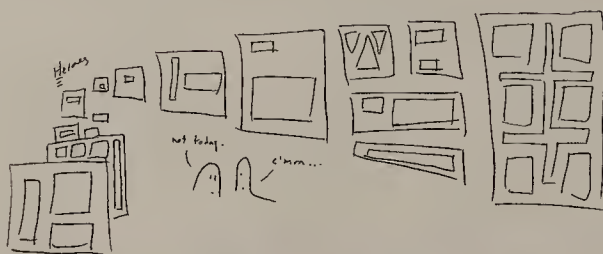
14. Why does the average shot length need to be so low? If you're prone to blink like all human beings do, then you'll probably miss one of every three shots. *Quantum of Solace* cries to be « *calmed down* ».

15. On a positive note, there were one or two worthy sequences (e.g. at the opera) and Craig's acting (and physical) ability was superior.

16. *Quantum of Solace* offered me, well, no solace. It is not only the shortest and most visceral of all Bond films, but also perhaps the worst (the criteria being its merits as a film and as an installment in the Bond series). I believe Broccoli and Wilson (if unable to change their ways) should cease making these films for the sake of movie-goers and James Bond fans. If they want to they can produce one more installment to round off with a « *quasi-Bond trilogy starring Daniel Craig* ». But otherwise I see no sense in making Bond films if these films do not deserve to be titled as such. Yet I doubt that this will happen. James Bond is, after all, a lucrative marketing device that generates plenty of box office receipts.

Hence, the question arises: how will James Bond return? ☹

TOM NOWAK





The Doyennes of Lunar Society

THE occasion for which Mrs. Mehitabel Virahallaloo poured a quart of milk down the small of her back to alleviate certain intolerable discomforts, barring her graceful situation amongst the other members of the Lunar Society, was met with consternated glances and the dissonant clinking of glasses that served to animate that collective disapprobation. The young gamine had helped herself to many liberal a serving of the divine Chicharrón and, ignoring the repeated exhortations imploring her reconsideration by fellow colleagues and one particularly disquieted server, was soon faced with the invariable outcome of any action predicated on rashness, poverty-line insouciance, and repeated prayers to the porcelain god (« Shiver my top-sails! Mama's bringing dinner tonight! »), namely some sort of gastric apocalypse. She was in the habit of ordering every porcine platter available on any night of fine dining, and was predisposed to leave those dishes untouched until they were lined up according to the sequence in which they had been requested.

Deliberately over-extending herself having discerned a monstrous partiality to the dish in question, Virahallaloo arrived at the seventh serving before taking exception to her stomach's repeated warnings of capitulation (the signs had been abundantly clear to the doyens presiding over her induction – for this was the reason for the celebratory gathering at *La Azotea*, her initiation into that reclusive order in dire need of secretarial organization – by the third helping, which seemed to bear responsibility for the fiendishly inhuman odours co-mingling with wafts of fried gristle and lyonnaised onions). Recalling dowdy Luci Vonk's earlier pronouncement that a tall glass of milk would be as good as any anodyne to the multiple inflammations that galled her pride and body, not anticipating the malevolence to which the Naga Jofokia pepper owed its endowments (nor for that matter the chef's Bangladeshi origin and fondness for cross-fertilizing ingredients), Virahallaloo began to gulp voraciously. It had been a heedless oversight to underestimate the influence such a dish could command over one's body.

Her state of distress was not restricted to the aches in her gullet, painful as they may be. This it did not take the others long to seize upon due to their realization that Virahallaloo was not afflicted with rickets; the locations of her pains were further implied by the way she darted back to the table from an apparently unsuccessful deposition at the lavatory (she did not take well to the patina of incontinent figure-

eights etched in relief like a decipherable cryptogram, nor for that matter the pesty woman lying on the tiled floor a few feet shy from a vacant stall, pathetically reaching for the door handle and whose meaning was quite equally as obvious: *death comes to those who wait!*). When she unsteadily approached the foot of the table at which Vonk, her assistants, Lady Bria Ardley and Lady Minnie Myrton, and doyenne Eudora Wojcik were discussing Mrs. Myrton's newly entered state of connubiality, Mabel's thoughts again returned to Vonk's discussion of the pitcher of milk's ungutatory properties.

Through a flawed (mis)perception of transitivity, she firmly clutched the handle of the jug while the others gawked, suffering her anguished whimpers with matronly compassion. They doubted her resolve when her intentions became clear, protested her incivility when she leaned over against the table with the jug of milk hanging portentously in the air.

« Heaven above! »

« Bosh! »

« She wouldn't dare! »

« Cutting a damned dumb dido Mabel! » and other such phrases hung suspended in the air like shoes from a Slipper Tree. With a quivering lip, Mehitabel brusquely assured her newfound friends that they would all « *somehow – someday – get past this* ».

The kangaroo court that soon afterwards assembled to prosecute Virahallaloo's innumerable offenses and abuses to the DLS *Codes of Conduct*, chief among the more serious indictments her profanation of the ritual liquefaction and eventual consumption of the *Sous-Egg* during the synodic month, had every reason to forego the procedural system of checks and balances considering the degree to which Virahallaloo had unerringly desecrated their most sacred of principles. This sentiment was perhaps most enigmatically expressed by taciturn Paviloda in his sentiments: « *Glattes eis ein Paradies für den, der gut zu tanzen weiss* ». The adjudicators presiding over the mockery-of-a-trial were Lucinda Vonk, her husband Piotr Paviloda, fellow doyenne Ellemenella Van Zandt, and Decimo Zeuse, that adaphoristic heresiarch of the Western Plains. Chief Justice Miaou, purported to be descended from the Tomcat Murr, was also in attendance, though his impartiality was not in any way assured for the simple reason that it was, in preparation for what he assumed would have been the newest addition to his coterie of abiding doppelgängers, his paws that had personally brewed Virahallaloo's *Sous-Egg* to devastating perfection. His owner François

Martineau had decided not to attend because, despite Miaou's multiple urgings to be petted during his purring diatribes, such demonstrations of unchecked power had in the past disturbed the former member of the Sous Gang's delicate sensibility.

« *Rrrraaw – Madame Mehitabel Emma-Constance Nicolette Virahallaloo*, Miaou began, *votre examen selon les règles rigoureuses de notre administration, prouve que vous êtes saine de corps et d'esprit pour subir ici votre procès suite aux nombreux affronts que vous avez commis envers notre petite, cependant respectable communauté, à laquelle vous aviez, il y a quelque temps et avec grande assiduité, daigné faire l'effort d'adhrer. Selon plusieurs accusations déposées contre vous et, compte tenu de la gravité de leurs conséquences sur notre société, ce tribunal a conclu que, vous garder captive de votre misérable inconscience, causerait une terreur incalculable sur notre monde. Il est difficile de concevoir les limites de la dévastation que vos actions sans retenue ont causé sur un monde crédule et sans ressources. La sagesse est un bien que l'humanité préserve, ce en triomphant de la vague montante de l'indifférence qui malheureusement caractérise cette décennie, afin d'être prête à l'imminente confrontation avec ces inconscients précurseurs de l'obscurité. Voici donc les considérations dont nous avons charge de délibérer en toute sérénité sur votre destin: quel est votre plaidoyer? »*

No sooner had Miaou's proclamation ended than the rate of Mrs. Virahallaloo's steady decomposition had begun to emit a foul effluvium, to which all the parties had taken notice: willowy facial contortions and a violent smacking of the lips in the vain hope of giving the malodorous stench sense, shape and form was the common response by those present. Lucie Vonk had dared to say that it rivaled Virahallaloo's past olfactory assaults, whereas Decimo, hitherto unfamiliar with the woman's physiological abnormalities, suggested that the experience would not be dissimilar from the expected consequences of putting a polecat in a microwave. Miaou, dissatisfied with the relief his enameled gavel afforded his teeth, was rendered incapable of resisting his more primal urges in charging Virahallaloo in contempt of court while in the midst of gnawing at the body's limbs, having adroitly leapt from his elevated seat to take advantage of the rigor mortis setting in.

It took the vocal insistence of Behzad Molavi, who had been representing the defendant's family interests in his temporary legal appointment as counsel, to suspend the momentary lapse in judgment of the court with regard to the contents of the deceased's stomach, which had been up

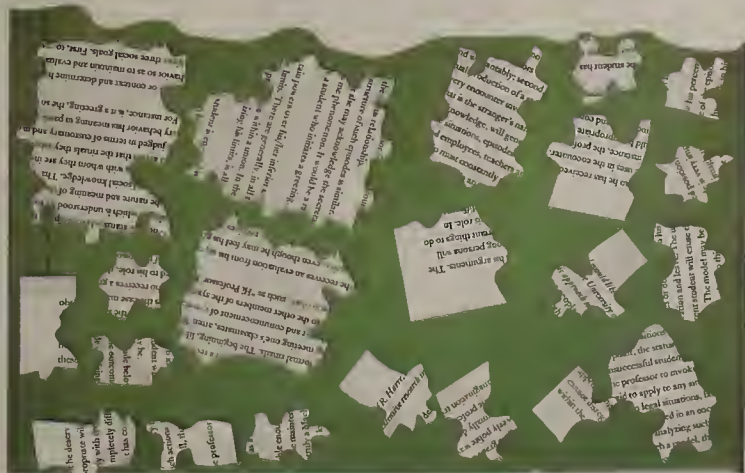


As he pawed at the waistline of Mehitabel's trousers, the body began to gambol violently in the air, such as to give

While Vonk and her husband restrained the merrymaking caboose, Micaou deftly clawed the trousers down; the horrors to which they were confronted threatened the apostasy of one's unanswerable commitment to religion, while others, such as counsel Molavi, simply chose to profit of the occasion, by committing the scene to memory. It may hap that the *bête noire*'s speech, the peroration of ideas having gone largely without notice, had attempted to obviate such frenzied responses in a more than conciliatory fashion; had desired to be heard and understood without undue attention to the manner in which it happened to prophesy the series of events to follow its inquisition. Pavlova thought of Bo Diddley's Jupiter Thunderbird. Vonk, pygopagan conjoining with a parasitic twin. Zeuse swallowed his own ascending bile at the sight of the lobules hanging from the creature's chin, recalling a taunting line

With appreciative thanks to Denis Briffaud.

JEAN MARC
AH-SEN



Visual Affect in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth*: Part III

PRIOR

to analyzing the Super-Man scene, it should be noted that the Superman archetype appears quite frequently throughout *JC*. For instance, this archetype essentially frames the entire graphic novel—or, more accurately, the story (i.e. excluding the para-textual visuals and appendices)—insofar as he first appears during the prologue as the « *Famous Star of T-F's big show* » who doubles as Jimmy's childhood idol and quasi-paternal figure and last appears in the fantastical finale as, once again, a paternal figure coddling and protecting the childhood Jimmy. It follows, then, that my selection and subsequent analysis of this scene is further justified because it is a leitmotiv in *JC*.

The Super-Man scene (or set of scenes) that I would like to focus on in *JC* specifically involves a Super-Man character committing suicide. I would like to suggest that the most visually shocking moment is the suicidal-jump scene itself, which I will carefully scrutinize; however, I want to situate my analysis of this scene in a more diachronic manner by analyzing the sequence of events and/or details that unfold over the span of a couple of pages. The rationale behind this approach is premised on the notion that many—if not all—of the preceding and succeeding panels intensify and add to the visual affect of the suicidal-jump scene because of the specific stylistic choices Ware has made; moreover, the importance of focusing on what is essentially the context of the suicidal-jump scene is underscored by Groensteen when he states that, « [t]he comics image, whose meaning often remains open when it is presented as isolated (and without verbal anchorage), finds its truth in the sequence » (114). Therefore, the sequence of events and/or details that unfold chronologically includes the following: the recognition-connection scene, the suicidal-jump scene, the immediate aftermath detail, the shock scene, the aftermath scene, and the follow-up detail.

The recognition-connection scene occurs when Jimmy notices Super-Man¹ atop a building across the street from his work and believes that he is waving to him exclusively. Realistically, the chances of this recognition-connection are rare; however, the incremental elevation of Jimmy's head and hand over the top of his cubicle, along with his excited facial expression, is evidence of a sort of self-delusion in pro-

cess insofar as Jimmy sincerely believes that he is the recipient of Super-Man's wave. Although there is no absolute way of knowing whether or not Super-Man is exclusively waving to him, Ware's formalistic choices supports this interpretation because the juxtaposition of two equally-sized panels produces a sense of intimacy, which subsequently raises the possibility that Super-Man is waving to him; however, Ware's usage of perspective—i.e. the fact that Super-Man is (not literally) the size of Jimmy's head—acts as a reminder of the distance between the two individuals and the unlikelihood that Super-Man is actually waving to Jimmy. Despite the ambiguous nature of the recognition-connection scene, one outcome of the non-exclusive-wave interpretation is a sense of pathos, which is experienced by the interactive participants and based on observing Jimmy's self-delusion. Moreover, the fact that Jimmy's childhood idol is the T.V. Super-Man that was introduced in the prologue increases both the likelihood that Jimmy really believes there is recognition and connection and the degree of pity felt by the interactive participants. The seemingly harmless nature of the recognition-connection scene has a certain degree of emotional weight that is transferred over to the unexpected suicidal-jump scene that follows.

In relation to the suicidal-jump scene, then, I will argue that there are three features that constitute its emotional resonance: the Given-New Structure, the colour scheme, and the panel-to-panel transition; the latter includes closure and the gutter. Firstly, the Given-New structure of the suicidal-jump scene conveys a sense of irony that manipulates and affects the interactive participants; this irony can be explained by looking closely at the left and right panel of this scene. The left panel (Given) entails something the viewer already knows, something that is presented as « *commonsensical, self-evident* » (Kress and van Leeuwen 181); thus, in relation to this scene, it is not unheard of to see a superhero on top of a skyscraper preparing to launch into the air to save the day, especially in the comics medium. The right panel (New) entails something which is not yet known or agreed upon by the viewer, something that is « *problematic* » and « *contestable* » (181), which warrants the interactive participants to « *pay special attention* » to it

(181); thus, in relation to this scene, it is « *problematic* » to see Super-Man (i.e. the iconic replica of Superman) not flying in the air after having jumped off a skyscraper, but lying dead in street. The irony of this Given-New structure is premised on Ware's evocation and subsequent manipulation of certain ideological underpinnings related to comics; this amounts to the violation of the interactive participants' expectations of the abilities of Super-Man, which results in an overall shock, a visual affect. Moreover, due to the irony in this scene, Ware provides an opportunity for manifold interpretations that all amount to a sort of black humour that is rather perturbing—e.g. Super-Man is cynical, legitimately suicidal, twisted, delusional, or insane. Thus, the shocking, ironic Given-New structure of the suicidal-jump scene can be characterized as exemplifying the grotesque insofar as it is « *bizarre* » and « *fantastically absurd* » (OED) due to the violation of the interactive participants' expectations of Super-Man's abilities.

Secondly, the colour scheme of the suicidal-jump scene enhances the visual affect due to the stark juxtaposition between the dull, low saturation, monochromatic cityscape and the vibrant, high saturation, flat colour Super-Man. I would like to expand upon these characteristics in order to elucidate the visual affectiveness of this scene, starting with the notion of saturation.

It should be first noted that saturation's « *key affordance lies in its ability to express 'temperatures', kinds of affect* » (Kress and van Leeuwen 233, italics added); as well, this feature is an excellent example of visual affect. In relation to the suicidal-jump scene, then, the idea that low saturation can be « *cold and repressed, or brooding and moody* » (233) accurately suits the monochromatic, brown-tinged cityscape insofar as these temperatures connect to and intensify the misanthropy related to this environment (N.B. I will expand upon the misanthropic cityscape later; for now it is only important to highlight the cold and repressed associations with the cityscape). Conversely, the dueling temperatures associated with high saturation—e.g. « *positive, exuberant, adventurous, but also vulgar and garish* » (233)—are both, rather paradoxically, appropriate for the brightly dressed Super-Man in the suicidal-jump scene because this scene conveys both strong, altruistic, and heroic associa-

¹ N.B. The « *suicidal-jump scene* » is a sub-scene that falls under the category of « *the Super-Man scene* ».

² Due to the fact that there is more than one Super-Man throughout *JC*, it is im-

portant to keep in mind the context as the exposition continues; also keep in mind the distinction between Super-Man and DC's *Superman* because this is an obvious connection that Ware plays with.



tions and perverse, unstable, and unsettling associations. Therefore, the juxtaposition between low and high saturation—along with the temperatures associated with each polarity—draws an immense amount of attention to the suicide itself, which results in a very emotionally stimulating scene overall.

Not only does the low and high saturation impact the visual affect of the suicidal-jump scene, but the contrast between the monochromatic cityscape and the flat colour of Super-Man enhances the emotional capabilities of it. More specifically, in relation to the distinctive feature of « differentiation » in colour—or in this case « lack of differentiation » (234)—the cityscape provides a « restrain[ed] » (234) backdrop that foregrounds the flat colour of Super-Man. The significance of this foregrounding, and the subsequent visual affectiveness of this scene, resides in some of the qualities associated with flat colour. McCloud posits one such quality when he states that, « [i]n flat colors forms themselves take on more significance. The world becomes a playground of shapes and space » (192). McCloud's emphasis on form and shape dovetails quite nicely with what Kress and van Leeuwen note about flat colour: « [f]lat colour may be perceived as simple and bold in a positive sense, or as overly basic and simplified » and « [f]lat

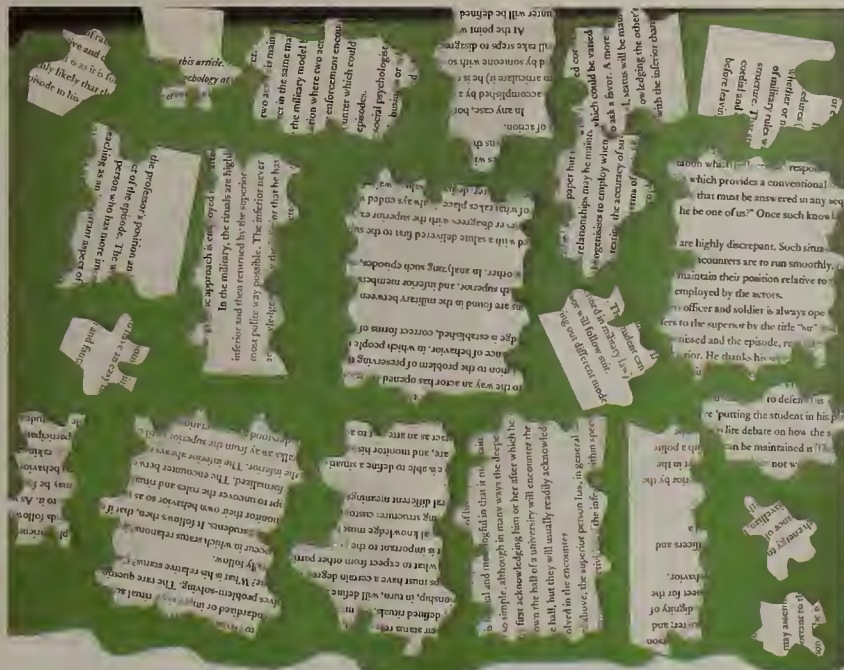
colour is generic colour, it expresses colour as an essential quality of things » (234). Due to the attention-grabbing features of flat colour, then, the interactive participants can easily be swept up by the stunning suicidal actions of Super-Man. As well, along with the attention-grabbing features of flat colour, the notion of « association » and/or « provenance »—i.e. another affordance of colour that entails asking questions like « where have we seen this colour before ? » (232-33)—is important because the red, blue, and yellow are associated with the « iconic power » of the perennial Superman costume; this iconic power is related to how superheroes are mythologized and subsequently recognized (McCloud 188). This iconic power of association re-emphasizes both the connection to the Superman archetype and the ideological underpinnings of comics; Ware uses both of these to affect the interactive participants and play with their expectations. All of these features of the colour scheme—saturation, differentiation (i.e. monochrome), and flat colour, along with other affordances of colour—both accentuate and constitute the bizarre, visually affective, grotesque nature of the suicidal-jump scene.

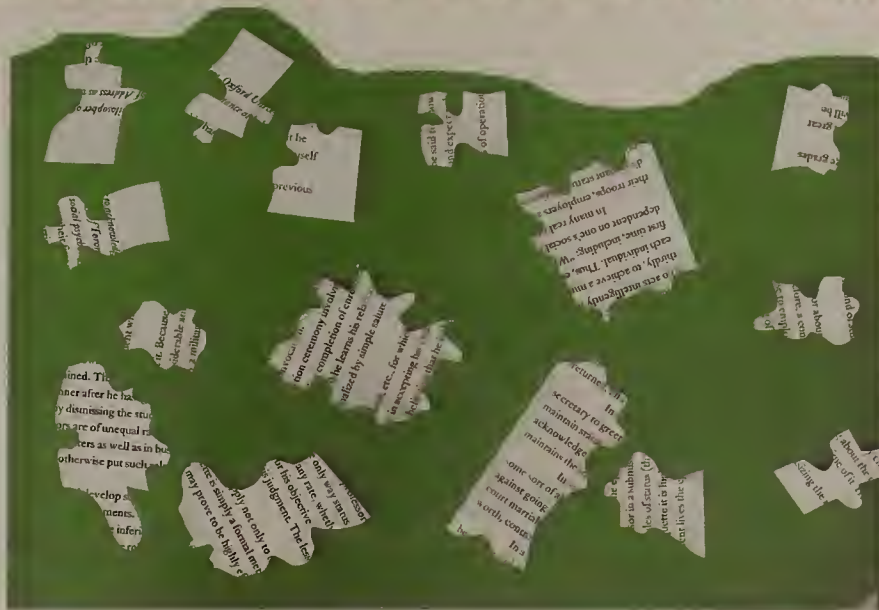
Thirdly, the panel-to-panel transition of the suicidal-jump scene—accompanied by the inextricable notion of closure

and the gutter—is a salient, visually affective feature that I want to now focus on. The type of panel-to-panel transition, then, that occurs in this scene is « moment-to-moment » (McCloud 70)³ because at one moment Super-Man is getting ready to jump and the next moment he is laying face first on the street. As McCloud notes, the moment-to-moment transition requires « very little closure » (70); hence, the incumbent involvement of the interactive participants to « mentally construct a continuous, unified reality » (67) is set within very restrictive, interpretive parameters. This restraint results in the « agent of time, change, and motion » (i.e. closure) (65) conveying an almost immediate movement from life to death. The instantaneous nature of this panel-to-panel transition constitutes the visual affectiveness of the suicidal-jump scene.

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³ It could be argued that the suicidal-jump is « action-to-action »; however, « moment-to-moment » is more suitable because this scene is not explicitly representing kinesis, which is a common feature in McCloud's examples.





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